

EVANGELISM, DISCIPLESHIP AND COUNSELING- ONE MINISTRY?

As many of you already know, the new Course II and III materials are now available. You will notice in these materials, as well as in others of our publications, the terms “discipleship/counseling” and “discipler/counselor” are repeated throughout. This purposeful redundancy is intended to be a continuing reminder to view biblical discipleship as one ministry — not three separate and distinct ministries often called “evangelism,” “discipleship,” and “counseling.”

The world has borrowed the term “counseling” from the Bible, distorted its meaning, and now claims that the church should not use it. At the same time, the church has distorted the term “discipleship” to exclude evangelism and counseling. As a result, believers who seek counsel for serious problems often are reluctant to ask for help from someone who has only had training in evangelism or discipleship. They view counseling as very specialized and complex. So, they look for someone who has experience and has been licensed as a professional counselor.

Similarly, those who are trained in evangelism and discipleship often avoid training in counseling because they also are convinced that counseling is difficult and complicated. They have the idea that training in evangelism and discipleship should be restricted to the presentation of the Gospel and the beginning practices of the Christian life, such as Bible study, memorization of Scripture, prayer, etc. They see themselves as unable to help a person who is undergoing serious or ongoing debilitating problems. Even worse, a large number of pastors view themselves as inadequate in this area. As a result, those in their care who are experiencing serious problems are often sent to outside so-called “experts,” or perhaps, to paid professionals who have been hired as part of the church staff.

There is another important reason for practicing discipleship as one ministry instead of three. When discipleship training is divided artificially into several parts, believers tend to be trained as salesmen rather than as physicians. Like a salesman, the believer is trained to focus on one particular need in a person’s life and so he learns how to present a particular specialized message or follow a specific procedure. Therefore, when he ministers to people his primary focus is on a memorized presentation or set procedure. He ministers to everyone the same way regardless of the circumstance or current state of the individual. It is no wonder that if someone with a difficult problem asks him for help, he refers the person to someone else.

On the other hand, the primary-care physician has been trained to respond to all types of physical needs. First, he conducts a thorough evaluation of the person’s condition. Only then does he determine how best to help the person and tailor his approach.

Like the Great Physician, a biblical discipler takes time to understand, from a biblical perspective, the condition of the one to whom he is ministering. For example, suppose an unbeliever asks you for help in dealing with a problem such as depression. If you are a biblical discipler, you would first ask many questions that would reveal his unbelief and undisciplined life. After a thorough evaluation of his spiritual needs, you would start by presenting the Gospel because his greatest need is salvation. However, when you make the presentation, you would continually relate the elements of unbelief and undisciplined life to the Scriptures that deal with these subjects and

point out his need for a savior. Then, you would show him that only after he receives Christ can he deal with depression in a way that brings peace and joy and lasting victory.

As a biblical discipler, you would then continue to help the person change in a permanent way. You would not only deal with the current situation; but also train the disciple how to face, deal with, and endure every future trial of life in a manner that pleases God. Your goal for the person would not be merely temporary or quick relief at a humanistic level but steady growth into the likeness of Christ.

The Bible describes discipleship as much broader and deeper than the “discipleship” that is often practiced today. Jesus specified in *Matthew 28:19-20* that His disciples were to “...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded .” Jesus made it clear that, in addition to presenting the Gospel, making disciples includes teaching believers to observe *all* that He taught about how to live victoriously.

The command to disciple includes all aspects of personal ministry to others. As described and practiced by the writers of Scripture, biblical discipleship involves evangelizing, baptizing, teaching, admonishing, instructing, comforting, encouraging, restoring, strengthening, reproving, rebuking, and exhorting others to follow a biblical pattern of life (*based on Matthew 28:19-20; Romans 15:14; II Corinthians 1:4; Galatians 6:1; I Thessalonians 3:2; II Timothy 4:2; Hebrews 10:24*)

The Scriptures do not separate discipleship into separate and distinct ministries such as “evangelism,” “discipleship,” and “counseling.” Biblical discipleship includes all that is needed to help anyone from the unbeliever who needs salvation to the maturing believer who is still learning to follow all that Jesus taught.

Biblical discipleship is both broad and deep, but it is simple to understand. All of Jesus’ teaching was summarized in just two commandments: love God and love others (*Matthew 22:37-40*). Deeds of love are the primary characteristics of a disciple of Christ (*John 13:34-35; 14:15*). Loving others is simple to understand, but it involves sacrifice. Love is an act of the will to sacrificially give up self for the Lord and other people. It involves dying to self. So, the primary issue to address in beginning to help someone with difficulties is whether the person is focused on pleasing self or dying to self.

Helping someone to face, deal with, and endure even the most serious of problems or circumstances in a manner that pleases God is not a complicated or mysterious process. It is merely a matter of helping him to walk by the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (*Galatians 5:16-25*). When a person is walking by the Holy Spirit, he has complete victory in dealing with and enduring the tests and trials of life. He does not experience sinful anxiety, fear, anger, depression, or any of the other debilitating problems so common around us today.

Certainly, training is required to learn how to disciple effectively. Jesus spent time training his disciples and he has left us His Word for the purpose of providing specific guidance on how to deal with life. The Bible provides all the instruction that is needed on how to live a victorious life in the midst of any obstacle or difficulty. The believer has all that he needs to practice biblical discipleship

With this understanding, BCF has developed a training program that is based solely on the Word of God. Our desire is to help believers to have complete confidence in the Word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit. In particular, our aim is to provide the necessary training courses and materials to equip men and women to practice all aspects of biblical discipleship.